God's Care for Man: The Creation Ordinance of Marriage

Abstract

This study examines the creation ordinance of marriage as established in Genesis 2:18–25, exploring God's divine design for the union between husband and wife. Building upon previous instruction on creation ordinances, this exposition demonstrates how marriage reflects God's sovereign care for humanity through the account of Adam's need for a suitable helper and God's provision of Eve. The study traces the institution of marriage from its origins in Eden through biblical history, emphasizing the principles of monogamy, permanence, and the sanctity of the marriage covenant. Special attention is given to Christ's interpretation of marriage in Matthew 19, the impact of sin on this sacred institution, and marriage as a profound illustration of Christ's relationship with His church. Through careful exegesis and practical application, this work affirms the timeless relevance of God's created order for marriage in contemporary society.

Summary of Previous Study on Creation Ordinances

In our previous session on the origins of humanity, we introduced the topic of Creation Ordinances. We discussed how, throughout God's Word, it is evident that in Creation, whether in the natural physical world, such as the sun, moon, stars, and boundaries for water, or in the animal kingdom, God established order and structure. We noted that in a certain sense, these can be viewed as creation ordinances and natural laws derived from the sovereign will of the Creator. As the psalmist declares, "He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved" (Psalm 104:5).

We also discussed that when God created man, He sovereignly ordained order and structure for humanity. This time, however, relates to human behavior and activity. These behaviors and activities are extremely important in our world today. We identified several specific creation ordinances, or mandates, from Genesis 1 and 2: the procreation of offspring (1:28), the replenishing of the earth by filling it (1:28), subduing the earth (1:28), exercising dominion over creatures (1:28), engaging in labor to work the garden and care for it (2:15), observing the weekly Sabbath as God blessed the seventh day (2:2–3), and entering into marriage (2:24).

We attempted to categorize these ordinances into three fundamental areas of life: Family, Worship, and Labor. We briefly discussed the role of progressive revelation in this subject, noting that God revealed these activities in the Genesis account, but we were not initially given in-depth knowledge. As we continue through Scripture, more understanding is revealed. This applies to all the ordinances. It was not unusual for the Lord Jesus Christ, during His earthly ministry, to clarify and expand on the ordinances for us. Of course, progressive revelation concluded with the canons of the Old and New Testaments.

One example comes from Matthew 19, where the Lord Jesus, tested by the religious leaders regarding divorce, referred them back to the created order and pattern. "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, 'For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."

We then began using Genesis 1 and 2 to identify several fundamental truths from the Genesis creation narrative regarding the marriage and procreation ordinances. Among these truths, we established that procreation is a blessing from God, but it is valid only within the marriage covenant. Additionally, procreation, or the ability to have children, is based on God's will, for He opens and closes the womb.

We stated that the principle of monogamy is established in the order of creation: one husband and one wife, one man and one woman. This is extremely important for our world today. We concluded the introduction on ordinances by stating that the creation account of man and woman serves as the foundation for our understanding of the God-ordained place and function of human sexuality.

The man and woman became "one flesh." We live in a society, culture, and indeed a world where the sinful heart of humanity has tarnished the purity of this good gift from God. In fact, we have reached a point in our country where laws have been enacted to permit same-sex "marriages." A fundamental understanding of the created order is essential to understanding God's plan for marriage. Once again, Christians should help lead men and women back to the Creator's order and structure. As Jesus said, "It was not this way from the beginning!"

Man's Need for a Woman: Adam's Need

We now return to the text of Genesis 2:18–25 to examine the passage more closely. As with everything else within the creation account, one of the first things that is clear is that God is the initiator of everything. Notice the God-initiated activities throughout the passage. In verse 18, "The Lord God said." In verse 19, "The Lord God had formed." In verse 21, "The Lord God caused." In verse 22, "The Lord God made." This divine initiative underscores the sovereignty and intentionality of God in the institution of marriage.

When we consider the context of the first two chapters of Genesis, something remarkable stands out about verse 18. Six times in Genesis chapter 1, we read, "And God saw that it was good." This is capped off by 1:31 with "it was very good." Now, we find something that is not good: namely, that this created man is alone. We are not told exactly why Adam being alone was not good. He was in Paradise with no sin. He had all of creation at his disposal. Perhaps it was because he needed help with the task of tending the garden. At this point, it didn't even seem that Adam realized he had a need. But God knew.

The writer of Ecclesiastes, Solomon, wrote in chapter 4: "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?" Regardless of Adam's immediate awareness, God decided to create a "suitable helper."

By "suitable," Scripture refers to a complementary counterpart, one also made in the image of God, who can fulfill the need for companionship. The Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:9, "Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man." At this point in the narrative in Genesis 2:19–20, God required the man to observe all the creatures and give them names.

This duty of naming the animals relates directly to God's choice to create a suitable helper for Adam. The hint is found in the latter part of verse 20: "But for Adam no suitable helper was found." God used this process to prepare Adam for marriage and demonstrate his need. The animals were not suited for the companionship he required, as they were not made in the image of God. As Kent Hughes states in his Genesis commentary, "To prepare the needy bachelor, God initiated an awareness program."

God Makes Woman: God's Supply

Through God's blessing and care for humanity, He addressed Adam's deep need for companionship. To achieve this, He first placed Adam into a deep sleep. While he slept, the Lord took one of Adam's ribs and used it to create the woman. The function and purpose of using a rib in the making of the first woman is significant. Although God was certainly not dependent on this physical element, He ensured that Adam understood the woman was made from him. We see this in Adam's expression, "This is bone of my bones!"

Matthew Henry offers a quaint description of this truth: the woman was "not made from his head to rule over him, not from his feet to be trampled upon by him, but from his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be cherished." The lesson for Adam was that the woman was much like him, made of the same material and created in the image of God too.

Once created, God "brought her to the man." Some interpret this as a reflection of the institution of marriage, though verse 24 serves that purpose more directly. John Calvin wrote about God's action of bringing the woman to the man: "Moses now shares that marriage was divinely instituted, which is particularly important to understand, for since Adam did not choose a wife for himself according to his own will, but received her as given and designated to him by God, the sanctity of marriage now becomes clearer, as we recognize God as its Author."

Verse 23 is poetry reflecting Adam's tremendous joy and excitement. The words express his profound delight: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." He had just laid his eyes on someone incredibly beautiful, unlike the creatures he had just been naming. Adam was overjoyed. This poetry offers a practical application for husbands: is there still a spark in your heart for your beloved wife? If not, then shame on you!

Marriage Ordained

Having received this beautiful woman by the hand of God, verse 24 establishes the marriage ordinance once and for all. It is unclear from verse 24 who is speaking. Is it a continuation of

Adam's words from verse 23? Is it the author of Genesis, perhaps Moses, concluding this work of God? Our Lord Jesus is undoubtedly the best interpreter of Scripture. Genesis 2:24 states, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." Jesus explains this for us.

Matthew 19:5–6 states, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate." In this way, the Lord expands upon Genesis 2:24. It is no longer "they will become," but rather, "the two will become one flesh." Many are perhaps more familiar with the American Standard or King James versions. The NAS says, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

The concepts of leaving and cleaving in verse 24 teach us a fundamental principle about God's plan for marriage. A man will leave his home and be united to his wife, suggesting commitment in heart and mind to one another and implying permanence in the marriage relationship through thick and thin. The word "cleave" means to hold fast to or cling to something. It is used in several areas of Scripture with profound significance.

In Deuteronomy 10:20, we read, "You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name." Similarly, Deuteronomy 13:4 uses this language of holding fast to God. We see that cleaving or holding fast is similar to a man's commitment to his faithfulness to God. Therefore, leaving and cleaving meant loyalty to each other until death.

A relevant question often arises in our culture: What constitutes a marriage in the sight of God? Sometimes we hear people say, "We love each other; we will get married sometime in the future, but for now, we want to live together." Christians respond that this is not appropriate, or worse, that it is a sin. They need to marry before living together. People often ask, "Why? In our hearts, we are committed to each other. We believe that marriage is merely a formality." The thoughtful Christian must respond with clarity, pointing to the biblical pattern of public covenant commitment that marks the leaving and cleaving described in Scripture.

Before we move on, it is important to remind ourselves that, thankfully, the Lord Jesus shed essential light on the marriage ordinance. In Matthew 19, the Lord states that there may be

situations where this permanence can be broken. This circumstance arises due to the sanctity of the bond being violated by one partner's unfaithfulness. In such cases, the offended spouse is not required to remain in that situation. Matthew 19:9 declares, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

The Sanctity of Marriage Throughout Scripture

We must reflect on how, according to God's Word, the institution of marriage has been valued since creation, after the fall of man, and throughout both the Old and New Testaments. It was recognized as a God-ordained institution and the only place for a God-honoring sexual relationship between one husband and one wife. As we reflect, we cannot help but notice, in some cases, the dreadful nature of sin and the profound impact of man's fall on marriage. Nevertheless, despite sin, God still holds man to the standard established at creation.

Biblical examples demonstrate the sanctity of procreation and the marriage bond throughout redemptive history. A significant example, and likely one that is quite familiar, is the story of righteous Joseph when he was tempted to engage in immoral relations with his master Potiphar's wife, as recorded in Genesis 39:6–12. When Joseph was pursued by this woman, he refused her advances with clarity and conviction. Joseph's reason for not engaging in sexual relations with the woman was rooted in his understanding that such an act would be a sin against God. He declared, "How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" May God help us to emulate Joseph in this regard, especially our young people who face similar temptations in their generation.

Another instructive incident involves Dinah, as recorded in Genesis 34:1–7. The reaction of Jacob's sons in verse 7 teaches us much about their understanding of sexual purity. When their sister was violated, the text states they were "filled with grief and fury, because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, a thing that should not be done." It is clear from Jacob's sons' reaction to their sister's rape that they were taught about the sanctity of sexual relations within marriage. This understanding prompted Simeon and Levi to kill not only the rapist but every male in the city. The point in all of this is that from the beginning, God's people were taught about the sanctity of marriage.

Abimelech, king of Gerar, as described in Genesis 20:1–7, illustrates that the creation ordinances regarding the sanctity of marriage were known even outside the patriarchs. In this case, a Canaanite king demonstrated an understanding of the wrongness of adultery, showing that God's moral law regarding marriage was written on human hearts and known across cultures.

We find a strong connection between the Decalogue and many of the creation ordinances. In Exodus 20, the commandments relate directly to the marriage and procreation ordinances. The fifth commandment, "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12), and the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14), both reflect the creation design. The writer to the Hebrews declares, "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Hebrews 13:4).

The Problem of Polygamy in Biblical History

When we examine biblical history regarding multiple spouses, we must ask what the general outcomes of these marriages were. The earliest biblical account of a marriage with multiple spouses is found in Genesis 4:19–24, where we read of Lamech taking two wives. The context of this passage suggests that taking two wives aligned with other evil acts he committed. He was murderous and prideful. In addition, this Lamech was from the line of Cain. He is not the Lamech who was the father of Noah from the line of Abel. That may be significant. Cain, you might recall, was the murderer of his brother. In early biblical history, the Canaanites were notorious for their rebellion against God's order and structure.

We must address whether polygamy was ever lawful for the patriarchs or under Levitical Old Testament law. The answer is no. If not, why was it so prevalent? Did Hebrew culture make it acceptable? The sinful heart is the root cause of polygamy. The words Jesus spoke in Matthew 19:8 regarding divorce apply to the sin of multiple marriages: "Jesus replied, 'Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard.'" The same hardness of heart led to the practice of polygamy.

One of the saddest accounts of multiple wives and their terrible effects is found in King Solomon. We have this great wise king, David's son, led astray by the many wives he married. First Kings 11:1–8 records how Solomon "loved many foreign women," and "his wives turned

his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God." The tragic consequences of violating God's creation ordinance for marriage are evident in Solomon's spiritual decline.

Some verses in the Old Testament law have been interpreted by some as granting permission to marry multiple wives, such as Exodus 21:7–11, Leviticus 18:18, Deuteronomy 21:15–17, and 2 Samuel 12:7–8. However, these passages regulate existing sinful practices rather than endorsing them. God's accommodation of human sinfulness through regulation should not be confused with His approval.

Marriage as a Picture of Christ and His Church

Since creation and throughout biblical history, the institution of marriage was intended to provide much more than just blessing and provision for man. In a very real sense, the Lord Jesus Christ fulfills the institution of marriage. One key reason the Word of God emphasizes the sanctity of marriage is that it serves to illustrate the union and communion between the church and the believer with the Savior.

The Lord's love for the church in the New Testament is described using the analogy of a bridegroom to his bride. Time and again, the analogy of the marriage relationship depicts that of Christ and His people. Disobedience is portrayed as unfaithfulness to the marriage covenant. The Apostle Paul makes this connection explicit in Ephesians 5, where he instructs husbands to love their wives "just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." He concludes, "This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church."

Even in the end, in the new heavens and the new earth, the church is still described using the language of the marriage relationship. Revelation 21:2 declares, "I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." Verses 9 and 10 continue this imagery: "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." Finally, Revelation 22:17 invites us with these words: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

May the Lord, in His abundant grace, help the husbands and wives of this church to love each other in a way that reflects our Savior's love for His people. When we understand marriage not merely as a human institution but as a divine ordinance that points to the gospel itself, we begin to grasp its true significance. The creation ordinance of marriage is not simply about human flourishing, though it certainly includes that blessing. Rather, it is about displaying the covenant love between Christ and His church to a watching world.

In an age where marriage is redefined according to human preference and cultural trends, the church must return to the foundation laid in Genesis. We must proclaim that God's design for marriage, one man and one woman in a lifelong covenant, is not merely a religious tradition but the Creator's wise and loving plan. As Christians engage with contemporary challenges to biblical marriage, we do so not with anger or condemnation, but with clarity and conviction rooted in Scripture. We point people back to the beginning, as Jesus did, and we demonstrate through our own marriages the beauty and glory of God's original design.

Conclusion

The creation ordinance of marriage stands as a testament to God's care for humanity and His sovereign design for human flourishing. From the garden of Eden to the consummation of all things in the new creation, marriage has been and remains a sacred covenant established by God Himself. The account of Adam and Eve teaches us that marriage is not a human invention subject to cultural redefinition, but a divine institution that reflects eternal realities.

Throughout this study, we have seen that God initiated marriage to meet man's need for companionship, designed it to be permanent and exclusive, and ordained it to be the only appropriate context for sexual intimacy. We have witnessed how this truth has been recognized from the earliest days of human history, how sin has distorted it through practices like polygamy, and how God has consistently called His people back to the creation standard.

Most profoundly, we have discovered that marriage serves as a living illustration of Christ's relationship with His church. This elevates the marriage covenant beyond mere human commitment to a picture of divine love and redemption. Every Christian marriage has the potential to reflect the gospel, displaying Christ's sacrificial love and the church's faithful response.

As we conclude this study, may we be reminded that God's design for marriage is not burdensome but beautiful. It is His good gift to humanity, established in the perfection of Eden before sin entered the world. In our fallen world, where marriage is often treated casually or redefined according to human desire, the church must stand firm on the foundation of Scripture. We must teach the next generation what marriage truly is, support those who are married in living out their vows faithfully, and point all people to the ultimate marriage between Christ and His bride, the church.

May the Lord bless every marriage represented in His church, granting husbands and wives the grace to love each other as Christ has loved us. May our marriages be marked by the leaving and cleaving that Scripture commands, by faithfulness that endures through every trial, and by a love that reflects the covenant-keeping character of our God. And may those who observe our marriages see in them a glimpse of the greater reality, the eternal union between the Savior and His redeemed people, for which every earthly marriage is but a shadow and foretaste.